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*Saggi*

## The Many Faces of God: Monotheism, Religious Symbols and Theogony in Schelling's Berlin Lectures

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### Abstracts

In this paper I discuss some of the crucial concepts of Schelling's Berlin lectures. In particular, I show how Schelling's discussion of monotheism grounds his interpretation of Theogony.

Oggetto di questo paper sono le lezioni berlinesi di Schelling e alcuni dei loro concetti principali. In particolare, mostro come l'analisi del monoteismo fonda l'interpretazione Schellingiana della Teogonia.

Objet du présent essai sont les classes enseignées par Schelling à Berlin. En particulier, il montre comme l'analyse du monothéisme est la base de l'interprétation de la Théogonie selon Schelling.

### Keywords

Schelling - Berlin Lectures - Monotheism - Religious Symbols - Theogony - Philosophy of Mythology - Philosophy of Revelation

## Introduction

The goal of this paper is that of discussing the interconnections between some elements of Schelling's Berlin lectures. In particular, I want to focus on Schelling's reading of monotheism as exposed over the course of the first six lectures of the series concerning mythology. In Schelling's own words, monotheism is «the first presupposition of the theogonical process», and is «posited together with human essence itself». Moreover, this concept «contains the law and, as it were, the keys of the theogonical dynamic»<sup>1</sup>. By theogonical process, Schelling indicates humanity's development of increasingly deeper representations of the divine across history. Since the study of this process is the main theme of Schelling's Berlin lectures, it is possible to claim that the exposition of the concept of monotheism lays the foundation of the whole of Schelling's late philosophy.

Accordingly to this understanding of the concept of monotheism as the heart of Schelling's Berlin lectures, I will show how exactly this notion is connected to the theogonical process. In this regard, I will analyze how the representations of the divine which mark the different stages of the theogonical process are engendered according to the metaphysical forces that Schelling presents in his assessment of divine uniqueness. Furthermore, I shall argue that Schelling develops a theory of our religious images as symbols of the divine, namely manifestations of God as images which present and embody a transcendent reality. On Schelling's understanding of symbols, these are neither given to humanity as a kind of revelatory deposit, nor are they the result of our mental projections or fancies. Instead,

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<sup>1</sup> F. W. J. SCHELLING, *Philosophie der Mythologie*, in ID., *Schellings Werke*, hrsg. von Manfred Schroter, Becksche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Munchen 1943; tr. It: *Il Monoteismo*, a cura di Leonardo Lotito, Mursia, Milano 2002, 23.

the German philosopher provides us with a powerful middle position, treating religious representations as the result of the cooperation between human imagination and divine creativity.

This symbolic feature of our religious representations is crucial, insofar as we come to partake of the divine through them. Accordingly, as I will explain in detail below, more refined religious representations do not only mark our increased awareness of God's nature. Rather, they signal a higher degree of participation of humanity in the divine life. In this respect, I shall argue that Schelling understands the interactions between God and human beings as those entertained between living beings, as the mortal and the divine dimension each partakes and is in communion with the life of the other. Accordingly, religious symbols are the products of this living relationship, and the fullness with which they embody the divine gives us a measure of the depth of humanity's communion with the divine in a particular historical and social setting.

This paper will be divided into six sections. In section one and two I shall present Schelling's understanding of the concept of monotheism. In this regard, I will discuss the relationship between Schelling's exposition and its connection to what he takes to be the traditional dogmatic understanding of monotheism. Moreover, I will show how according to Schelling the truth of monotheism does not prevent us from truthfully imagining God in a multitude of forms. In section two, I will discuss Schelling's doctrine of the potencies and its connections to the concept of monotheism. This doctrine will be necessary in order to bridge the concept of monotheism to the theogonical process and the study of religious symbols and their development.

In section three, I will discuss Schelling's interpretation of the Biblical narrative of the Fall and its relationship to the concepts exposed in sections 1 and 2. I shall also discuss how Schell-

ing sees this event as implying a forgetfulness of God's nature on humanity's part. This, causes the beginning of the theogonical process as the long way for humanity to regain an awareness of God as triune. In section four, I will go deeper in Schelling's analysis of this history of restoration, by showing how he divides it into two stages, namely that of mythology and that of revealed religion. In this regard, I shall introduce the discourse concerning religious symbols, discussing how their development marks the progress of the theogonical process, and how the different features characterize the symbols we find in mythology and those we encounter in revealed religion.

In section five and six I shall present the above mentioned interpretation of religious representations as symbols. I will also discuss how they are connected to a metaphysics of participation. As a conclusion, I shall explain how according to Schelling Christianity, as the one and only revealed religion, introduces religious symbols which «cannot be improved upon», hence signaling the end of the theogonical process and the regaining by humanity of its awareness of the nature of God as triune.

## 1. On The Concept of Monotheism

In order to present Schelling's concept of monotheism, it is crucial to observe how he addresses this notion through two different levels of interpretations. According to one level, we can read the concept of monotheism from a philosophical point of view, exploring through reason the metaphysics underlying the dogma received from the tradition. According to the other level, we can choose to understand monotheism precisely as a dogma, seen in the context of religious practices and as part of an authoritative religious text. These two levels do not exclude one another: as Leonardo Lotito puts it, in Schelling the dogmatic

understanding of monotheism is the ground for any philosophical reading of this concept<sup>2</sup>.

According to Schelling, dogmatic monotheism proclaims God to be the one true God among many false deities. On this level «the true, authentic God, teaches the Old Testament, is always just the unique, he who is unique»<sup>3</sup>. Hence, in this view the plurality of false deities stands opposed to the one true God. In turn, if we understand philosophically the notion of God that emerges from the monotheistic dogma, we cannot but conclude that all representations of God are manifestations of the same reality. This, argues Schelling, follows because the concept itself of the «capital “G” God» already includes his oneness. Hence, he cannot be opposed to other deities insofar as he is not on the same level as them. Quoting John of Damascus, Schelling claims that God is more than just unique, but rather «over-unique». Subsequently, through the dogma «is not the plurality of God in general to be denied, but rather the plurality of God as he is in himself»<sup>4</sup>. In other words, there can be many «small “g” gods», but just one true God beyond and above all of them.

Accordingly, God’s metaphysical oneness can be represented in a plurality of images without causing the breakdown of his essential unity. Thus, we might say that Schelling thinks of God as the one God above and beyond all the others as there is just one «matter» for all representations of God, including all the «small “g” gods»<sup>5</sup>. Disregarding the number of divine entities a religion portrays, they all embody the one absolute reality. To be sure, Christianity provides a dogmatic understanding of God which by itself is in contrast with that of the polytheistic and

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<sup>2</sup> SCHELLING, *Il Monoteismo*, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Ivi, 96.

<sup>4</sup> Ivi, 52-53.

<sup>5</sup> Ivi, 7.

other (so Schelling calls them) mythological religions. Nonetheless, a correct philosophical understanding of this dogma allows us to see how these different representations are united from a metaphysical point of view. Thus, in Schelling's reading of the monotheistic dogma our apprehension of the divine through the dogma elicits a metaphysical discourse on the notion of monotheism. Subsequently, we can go back to the dogmatic formulation and see it as describing a representation of God, that is, the one true God manifest on mount Sinai, which is the actual embodiment of the metaphysical realities we previously contemplated.

In this respect, as Francesco Tomatis meticulously notices, it is important to remark how for Schelling it is not enough to individuate the God of dogmatic theism as the final goal of philosophical inquiry. In turn, the goal and perpetual object of philosophy lies in investigating the conditions of possibility of the «living system in which all others coexist». In other words, we cannot stop to the dogmatic understanding of God as opposed to other divinities. Instead, we have to analyze the monotheistic dogma in order to develop a metaphysical understanding of how God can be known as including in his reality those deities<sup>6</sup>. As he is described as a living system, we should avoid thinking of the one, all-embracing God as a static essence, or some sort of Hickian unfathomable object beyond space and time that religions depict imperfectly. By contrast, as the ground of all religious systems is described as living, hence as a dynamic force in which representations of the divine coexist as expressions of this life. Furthermore, the living God of whom metaphysics traces the conditions of possibility can be discerned in history only *a posteriori*, through the exercise of philosophy on those systems coexisting in him (such as the Biblical representation of God).

<sup>6</sup> F. TOMATIS, *Kenosis del Logos*, Città Nuova, Roma 1994, 50-51.

Thus, the philosophical interpretation of the biblical dogma of divine uniqueness, lays the path to the understanding of the metaphysical DNA of all religious systems and therefore of the representations they contain. Through the efforts of philosophy, we come to experience God in his concrete expressions while being conscious that these do not express him exhaustively because of his over-uniqueness. Hence, philosophy boosts thought, giving it the means to expand beyond itself, and reaching to its object as found in the notion of monotheism, which is positively expressed in the biblical dogma<sup>7</sup>.

It is then clear how for Schelling philosophical activity does not aim neither at reducing the validity of biblical monotheism nor at overcoming it. As he puts it while discussing the Holy Trinity, what he aims to do through his metaphysical accounts of the Christian dogmas is not to weaken their traditional formulations or descriptions. Rather, he wishes to expand them, in order to allow them to cover elements of the Old Testament and of Paganism that otherwise would remain unexplained from a Christian point of view<sup>8</sup>. The question that Schelling is entertaining is not how he can use philosophy to substitute the old dogmatic formulations and explain the traditional doctrines better. Rather, he is working with the problem of which sort of philosophy he can develop on the ground of the Christian doctrines in order to «augment» these doctrines themselves.

Borrowing upon Raimon Panikkar, we could say that Schelling sees dogmas as the way we walk in order to reach fullness and communion with God<sup>9</sup>. Thus, neither do dogmas

<sup>7</sup> J. WIRTH, *The Conspiracy of Life: Meditations on Schelling and his Time*, SUNY Press, Albany 2003, 162.

<sup>8</sup> F. TOMATIS, *Filosofia della Rivelazione: Ragione e Rivelazione nell'ultimo Schelling*, Bompiani, Milano 2002, 569.

<sup>9</sup> R. PANIKKAR, *Il Cristo Sconosciuto* dell'Induismo, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1976, 58.



exclusively serve doxological or pastoral needs, nor do they forbid the employment of our intellectual capacities. On the contrary, dogmas call on us to mobilize all of our faculties and, as in Schelling's case, they can help us to approach God also from the perspective of reason, by allowing us to explore the divine dimension from a metaphysical point of view. Furthermore, the upshot of this interpretation of the Christian dogma as portraying God as «over-unique» and providing the matter for all religious representations, is that we can expand our insight into the nature of other religions. This means, that there is something of God to be found in all religious representations, and that not even the monotheistic image of him as the one God can exhaust his reality.

Schelling chooses to label as spirituality God's capacity of being one while allowing a plurality of manifestations. In Schelling's terminology, to be a spirit and therefore to express spirituality, indicates the capacity to remain in a state of potentiality while being in act, and vice-versa. Accordingly, God has the capacity of dwelling completely in oneself and remaining in a full state of potentiality, while at the same time becoming fully another in a completely alienating actualization. He is «[...] what that is continuously in act, without ceasing to be potency (source of being), what in being remains in control of himself, and vice-versa being in potency it is nonetheless act [...]».<sup>10</sup> This may sound as a somewhat stipulative meaning of what it means to be a spirit. However, Schelling claims that «[...] For what owns himself, [...] that in act stays in potency, [...] language does not own any other term but *spirit*»<sup>11</sup>. Quite simply, Schelling is making appeal to the fact that, given the religious

<sup>10</sup> SCHELLING, *Il Monoteismo*, 61-62.

<sup>11</sup> Ivi, 61-62.

milieu he was part of, he could not find any better word available.

As regards his case for his understanding of monotheism, Schelling begins his argument with a consideration about the nature of equality. According to the German philosopher, for two things to be described as equals, we must hold them to have something in common. At the very least, they must share pure being. However, if God as presented in the dogma is that being which has no equal, the one who is even above the other deities, then he does not share his being with anything. In this respect, God «[...] cannot be a being. [...] But if God is not a being, something that just participates in being, then he cannot be but *being itself*». In other words, Schelling argues that since God is the One without any equal, he cannot be just a being among many. Rather, he must be being itself. In this way, all other beings come to participate in him as they exist, but at the same time he does not share his being, meaning his way of being, with none of the other beings. Hence, God is unique in his being and at the same time he is in communion with all beings as they depend on him precisely because of what in his nature makes him incomparable to them.

Furthermore, adds Schelling, being itself is «[...] the preliminary and necessary concept of God, that we must posit in order to posit God (and not: a god). Therefore, God is being itself. But to be being itself is not his divinity, but rather the presupposition of his divinity»<sup>12</sup>. Thus, the concept of God includes oneness, which becomes the presupposition of any manifestation of God. Crucially then, God is not a one opposed to a plurality, as it would be in the dogmatic context. Instead, God's oneness escapes the dichotomy between the one and the many. This follows because if God is being itself, then as mentioned in

<sup>12</sup> Ivi, 35.

the paragraph above all entities participate in him as the source of their being. Thus, he is what gives ground and precedes the relationship between the one and the many, insofar as he is the source of the elements of this opposition. Accordingly, God is one in an absolute sense, and because of that he grounds the possibility of there being a one in a relative sense, namely as opposed to the many.

## 2. The Doctrine of the Potencies

We come now to another of the main aspects of Schelling's lectures on monotheism that I wish to discuss, namely the doctrine of potencies. Since this doctrine comes in different shapes as Schelling's work progresses over the years, I shall focus on presenting the outlines of such theory as exposed and employed in Schelling's lectures concerning monotheism. In brief, we might say that in Schelling's view the doctrine of the potencies is the final stage of reason's search for the metaphysical conditions and structure for any positive manifestation of God<sup>13</sup>.

This doctrine comes as the result of the application to God of those which Schelling sees as the fundamental interests of philosophy. According to him, philosophy is mainly concerned with the study of the three prime principles or causes. Although thanks to their essential involvement in all beings' essence these principles can be found in any region of reality, they come to their utmost presentation through this doctrine as they are examined in the context of the divine life. Schelling does not offer a deduction of the three potencies, but rather retrieves them from the philosophical tradition, quoting Aristotle and the Pitagorics. These causes, although they can go under different names, are always three and the same: what is unlimited, what limits the

<sup>13</sup> TOMATIS, *L'argomento Ontologico*, 152.

unlimited, and the cause which is the object of itself. These are, according to Schelling, the logical and metaphysical principles through which we can read the fundamental structure of reality. Specifically, by representing God through the connection of these three prime principles, we come to understand him in the fashion of a metaphysical trinity.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, as we shall better see in the next chapter, Schelling finds the Trinitarian dogma to be the best representation of God as one and as constituted by the three potencies. Consistently with a Christian point of view, Schelling understands monotheism as implying Trinitarianism. Hence, just as philosophy augments the monotheistic dogma, it also brings forth the doctrine of the potencies as an expansion of the Christian account of God as the Holy Trinity.

God is produced by these three potencies, while at the same time he coordinates and originates them in virtue of him being the One, thereby constituting the above mentioned living system in which all others coexist<sup>15</sup>. Thus, even through metaphysics we cannot grasp God directly in his oneness. However, according to the German philosopher the three potencies are God only when considered together, as he comes to be seen as an internally differentiated whole. Paraphrasing Tomatis' words, the three potencies show the one God<sup>16</sup>, only if we read them in their oneness and not mistakenly as many separated elements. Hence, as much as to grasp directly the One as an object in itself is impossible, the three potencies manifest God's oneness indirectly through their own essential communion.

In the context of the lectures on Monotheism the three potencies are labeled by Schelling as  $-A$ ,  $+A$ , and  $+A$ . The first two potencies,  $-A$  and  $+A$ , correspond to the unlimited

<sup>14</sup> Ivi, 151-152.

<sup>15</sup> SCHELLING, *Il Monoteismo*, 106-107.

<sup>16</sup> TOMATIS, *L'argomento Ontologico*, 131.

and what limits the unlimited. They are concerned with representing two absolute but in a sense static dimensions that we discover in God. On one hand, we find  $-A$  to be absolute and pure potentiality, namely God as the source of everything. On the other hand,  $+A$  is the opposite of the first potency, namely God as absolute and pure act. Thus,  $-A$  is God as he contains all possibilities, and  $+A$  is God as he actually expresses all possibilities. If these two were the only stages to be found in God's life, we would be stuck with two irreconcilable and opposing terms, something which would seem to break God's unity. The solution of this impasse is  $+ -A$ , the third potency, where the two opposites meet one another. This third potency represents as it were the union and the indifference of the first two potencies, being able to be in act while being in potency and vice-versa. This third potency is also what properly manifests God's spirituality, in his capacity of fully actualizing himself while neither dissolving nor losing his being in potency in his own outward expression<sup>17</sup>. Therefore,  $+ -A$  is the union of the two distinct moments represented by the other potencies. This, happens as they intertwine and mutually rely on one another to be represented. However, this third potency is not simply a «putting together» of the first two.  $+ -A$  is a unity, namely God in his full explication<sup>18</sup>. Later in his lectures, Schelling remarks that in the doctrine of the potencies with each posited element «is at the same time [posited] the postulate of the following one, and the reality of any preceding moment [...] the first potency is such just because the second one follows, and this is such just as

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<sup>17</sup> TOMATIS, *L'argomento Ontologico*, 129-131.

<sup>18</sup> J. E. WILSON, *Schellings Mythologie: zur Auslegung der Philosophie der Mythologie und der Offenbarung*, Stuttgart, Fromman-Holzboog 1993, 28.

the third one follows»<sup>19</sup>. Furthermore, in Schelling's words the three potencies are a «plurality, not a multiplicity»<sup>20</sup>. The three potencies are a set of fundamentally interrelated elements and they show the One beyond them thanks to the fact that they are not able to persist without the other two.

In this respect, I wish also to underline the fact that the three prime principles are called potencies, as I hold that this is not simply a stylistic choice. Rather, I believe that this term that Schelling employs<sup>21</sup> underlines the fact that these principles are dynamic and active. As God is a multiplicity, he is more akin to an organism rather than to an aggregate, hence a simple pile of casually related elements. Interrelatedness is fundamental to God's being, as he is constituted of different interlocking components, joined and interacting one with another just as the parts of living beings do. Thus, the doctrine of potencies is concerned with outlining as it were the dynamics of God's life as he comes to assume his spiritual shape. Of course, it is understood that to speak of dynamics in this context might be misleading, and we have to notice that this is not meant in terms of a temporal process: the world of reason is a logical one, where neither proper events, nor a succession of events can take place<sup>22</sup>. Hence, this movement happens eternally, i.e. beyond space and time, as it is a condition for being in space and time to be. Therefore, the three potencies stand in an eternal and thus logical succession, where all moments are present at the same time, intertwining one another.

<sup>19</sup> F. W. J. SCHELLING, *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, in ID., *Schellings Werke*, hrsg. von Manfred Schroter, Becksche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Munchen 1943; tr. it., *Filosofia della Rivelazione*, a cura di Adriano Bausola, Bompiani, Milano 2002, 217.

<sup>20</sup> SCHELLING, *Il Monoteismo*, 69.

<sup>21</sup> The German *Potenzen*.

<sup>22</sup> SCHELLING, *Filosofia della Rivelazione*, 109.

As we will better see in the next section, God permeates creation and is accountable for the being of everything. This is true not only in terms of God providing the ontological core of what there is, but also in terms of him providing the eternal rules according to which any sort of being unfolds. This follows as the potencies express the metaphysical framework of all possible manifestations of being. In Schelling's words «these three concepts are the true original concepts, the true original potencies of all being»<sup>23</sup>. In this respect, the three potencies are to be considered as universals, which at the same time are completely present in being allowing it to exist and persist<sup>24</sup>.

As mentioned multiple times over the course of this section, the three potencies are everything's metaphysical condition of existence. By portraying the potencies in God, Schelling gives of them the highest depiction possible, namely as the metaphysical condition of being of being itself. Since any other being has being itself and therefore God as a condition of existence and persistence, all beings have the three potencies as conditions of their existence and persistence. Accordingly, God as the creator and also as being itself is the condition of the potentiality of all that can be, the condition of the actuality of all, and the condition of the unity and persistence of all as possibility and actuality spiritually intertwined. Because of this he is the prime origin of any other being once he manifests positively in our finite reality<sup>25</sup>. Subsequently, and crucially for our enquiry, as the three potencies describe the ideal conditions of being of God, they can describe as well his manifestations in our symbolic representations of him.

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<sup>23</sup> SCHELLING, *Il Monoteismo*, 64.

<sup>24</sup> L. DUPRÉ, *The Role of Mythology in Schelling's Late Philosophy*, in *The Journal of Religion*, 87 (2007), 1-20, here 3.

<sup>25</sup> Ivi, 2.

### 3. God and Creation

I will now present the implications that Schelling's account of monotheism has for the relationship between God and creation. This, shall also be put into context with Schelling's reading of Genesis' narrative of humanity's fall. This way, I aim to discuss which are according to Schelling the results of the Fall, and how these produce the situation which marks the beginning of the theogonical process.

According to a motive often recurring in his works, Schelling understands creation as the product of a self-externalization underwent by God, as a sort of eternal kenotic process, through which God empties himself and becomes something different<sup>26</sup>. In other words, the process of creation is that of God's free self-negation and manifestation in a finite reality, thus creating a world which is nothing but «extra-divine» life<sup>27</sup>. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the three potencies are the archetypal structure of any being, God included. Hence, as God creates he does so according to the three potencies, in fact creating a spatio-temporal image of his own structure<sup>28</sup>. The structure of creation replicates God's, in that it presents the three potencies as the forces shaping it. Thus, although creation is extra-divine life, it is always in full communion with God.

Schelling carefully distinguishes creation from manifestation, where the second is something necessary and mechanic, and the first is the result of a free action of the divine will. However, he argues, for creation to be possible there must be some-

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<sup>26</sup> LIMONE, *Inizio e Trinità: il Neoplatonismo Giovanneo nell'Ultimo Schelling*, ETS, Pisa 2013 54.

<sup>27</sup> SCHELLING, *Filosofia della Rivelazione*, 469.

<sup>28</sup> R. F. BROWN, *The Late Philosophy of Schelling: the Influence of Boehme on the works of 1809-1815*, Associated University Press, London 1977, 21



thing intermediate between God and the act of creation itself. Without this, «the world could be only thought as an immediate and therefore necessary emanation of the divine essence»<sup>29</sup>. This intermediate element is the first potency, that which contains all things in potency. This, in relationship to creation is seen as containing the prototypes of all beings which God then puts into image according to the three potencies as the rules presiding the unfolding of being. Schelling, in keeping with an ancient tradition, calls these prototypes the divine ideas. Furthermore, as God creates by staring at it through an act of self-contemplation, Schelling identifies this potency as the wisdom of the Book of Proverbs<sup>30</sup>. Hence, on one hand wisdom is outside God as it stands in front of him as an object of contemplation. However, on the other hand it always stays in God as it is nothing but God's probing in the first potency, namely a part of himself - wisdom is nothing else but what the original Ur-will, the *koinonia* of the three potencies imagines once it stare at itself<sup>31</sup>.

Thus, it is not sufficient to proclaim God's necessary oneness in respect to a multiplicity of deities, in order to state the full consequences of there being only one divine matter. As the source of all being, God creates everything out of himself and is present in nature sustaining it as the result of an act as it were of alienation from himself. Hence, in his relationship to creation the divine substance can be talked of as a vital force underlying all of creation<sup>32</sup>. Moreover, as the divine substance is by itself indivisible and is present in all created realities, then is completely present in all of them. In a sense, in this picture the part is the

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<sup>29</sup> SCHELLING, *Filosofia della Rivelazione*, 489.

<sup>30</sup> Ivi, 491-493.

<sup>31</sup> LIMONE, *Inizio e Trinità*, 129.

<sup>32</sup> P. CLAYTON. *The Problem of God in Modern Thought*, Eerdmans Pub., Grand Rapids 2000, 480.

whole and the whole is not essentially anything more than what the part essentially is<sup>33</sup>. Therefore, being God is the one absolute reality and nothing can be that God is not fully present in it, and vice-versa<sup>34</sup>.

This is true of human beings in particular, as we are the images of God being spirits like him although in a limited way. Through his self-manifestation God progressively creates the natural world, sealing this process with an act of self-imagination of God himself. According to Schelling, this happens with the creation of humanity as the human soul possesses the faculty of imagination, namely of putting things into images. Just like God we are able of imagining although only in a finite way. According to Douglas Hedley, we can define our imagination as the capacity of putting experience into one<sup>35</sup>, a creative *nisus* toward unity<sup>36</sup>. Hence, while God puts things into image in terms of creating them out of himself, we can only put what already exists into unity.

What happens, is that God manifests himself in creation while persisting and sustaining it without losing his identity thanks to his perfect spirituality. Furthermore, God becomes self-conscious of this dynamic as he permeates our consciousness, and as we imagine him as the creator and sustainer, at the same time he imagines himself as such. In Schelling's own words, «[...] human consciousness is the goal and end of the entire natural process. In the human consciousness is reached that point where the potencies come back together in their unity, [...] where what eliminates God turns into what posits God»<sup>37</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> M. MANGIAGALLI, *Concezione Creazionista e Incarnazione di Dio nel Pensiero di F. W. J. Schelling*, 29.

<sup>34</sup> LIMONE, *Inizio e Trinità*, Aracne, Roma 2013, 37.

<sup>35</sup> D. HEDLEY, *Living Forms of the Imagination*, T&T Clark, London 2008, 48.

<sup>36</sup> Ivi, 52.

<sup>37</sup> SCHELLING, *Il Monoteismo*, 111.

God works through creation and eventually surfaces in human consciousness looking back at himself and his work. Imagination is then a process that mirrors the infinite as the infinite looks back at himself<sup>38</sup>, as the human soul's contemplation of God is God's contemplation of himself. Moreover, contemplating God as the origin and preserver of creation we can also reflect on this relationship. Consequently, we reflect on the prime principles of reality and the causes of creation and, in Schelling's view, we come to grasp the three potencies as the expression of God's life and as ruling the unfolding of reality. The human soul is in this sense a bridge between creation and God insofar as it is part of creation but is also able to join creation to God by expressing God's imagination of himself.

Hence, the result of God's creative act is the same as that of God's eternal coming to be as God the Spirit. Inasmuch as there is no absolute division in the One, similarly there is no such division in creation from the perspective of its relationship to God, as all its aspects are elements of an essential unity. All beings, physical and spiritual are fully part of the divine life, and they ought to be considered in all respects as manifestations of the one God. In this sense, creation is at the same time the negation as well as a part of God's own plenitude. Subsequently, for God to be the all-encompassing One, he must be able to include in itself its negation, namely the realm of being. The human soul is what is able to keep every pole of this relationship between God and creation together in a coherent image. Again, this goes back to our imagination, namely what makes us amphibious in respect to natural reality as we are part of it but we can transcend it<sup>39</sup>. Therefore, through imagination, we can bind together in a coherent vision the natural and the super-natural, thus bringing

<sup>38</sup> HEDLEY, *The Iconic Imagination*, Bloomsbury Academic, London 2016, 76.

<sup>39</sup> HEDLEY, *Living Forms*, 37

the process of creation to an end by perfectly imagining us, God, and creation as an harmonious unity.

The relationship between God and humanity brings with it also the seeds of religion as the expression of our connection with God, and therefore of religion as a historical phenomenon. In discussing the fundamental nature of our relationship with God, Schelling approaches the narrative of Genesis in a way analogous to that which he uses for the monotheistic dogma. Therefore, Schelling reads the history of the original couple as carrying in itself an account of the ideal or negative image of our relationship with God. In this respect, the Fall, as narrated in the book of Genesis, is a catastrophic event preceding history, which Schelling argues to be visible *a posteriori* in the fact that nature fails to display the unity it should have, as it is made unable to do so by the Fall itself<sup>40</sup>. Consequently, Schelling reads the end of the Edenic condition as the key to understand the historical, less-than-ideal positive forms assumed by this relationship as well as the beginning of human history as the quest for retrieving the Edenic condition.

According to Schelling, the Edenic condition of communion with God was so perfect that human consciousness beheld God inside itself and not in front of itself, as if he were an object. Humanity did not even have «[...] the time to create representations or concepts of God [...]»<sup>41</sup>. Hence, prime Edenic humanity is the perfect embodied image of the absolute<sup>42</sup>. In other words, in its ideal and eternal, perfect contemplation of God, humanity fulfills perfectly its role of mediator as it produces an image of itself, creation, and God as essentially in com-

<sup>40</sup> SCHELLING, *Filosofia della Rivelazione*, 605.

<sup>41</sup> SCHELLING, *Il Monoteismo*, 113.

<sup>42</sup> A. DEZI, *Potenza e Realta il Sovrarealismo Ontologico nel Pensiero di F. W. J. Schelling*, Mimesis, Udine 2013, 107.

munion. In this, humanity also acts as it were in the same way the third potency does. Just like the Spirit as +A is able to bring together -A and +A, so does humanity with God and creation: «Human consciousness is a mediator, a third between both of them»<sup>43</sup>. However, argues Schelling, although humanity's essence is the same as God's, namely pure freedom<sup>44</sup>, humanity is nonetheless only a finite replica of God. Hence, humanity can go astray in its employment of this freedom, thus provoking its own fall from grace and in so doing casting creation outside of communion with God<sup>45</sup>.

As God bestows humanity with absolute freedom<sup>46</sup>, humanity is on the ground of that so free that it can in principle negate itself and its essential nature. Moreover, the Ur-Mensch's first movement cannot be but away from God, as in a sense in the ideal state humanity is so close to God that no further proximity is possible - in Eden's ideal condition we «adhere to God»<sup>47</sup>. As Schelling thinks of the primordial communion as a condition of immobility on our part, accordingly the first movement as the beginning of activity and history cannot but result in the breaking of this communion<sup>48</sup>. Furthermore, the result of our first historical act of self-knowledge, is humanity's first actual consciousness of God as a separate being, as before history we were not conscious of God, but simply existed according to the «substance of our consciousness» - in eternity there is no consciousness of God as such, but rather and simply communion

<sup>43</sup> SCHELLING, *Il Monoteismo*, 113.

<sup>44</sup> P. TILICH, *Mysticism and Guilt-Consciousness in Schelling Philosophical Development*, Bucknell University Press, Lewisburg 1974, 45.

<sup>45</sup> MANGIAGALLI, *Concezione Creazionista e Incarnazione di Dio nel pensiero di F. W. J. Schelling*, 32.

<sup>46</sup> SCHELLING, *Il Monoteismo*, 114.

<sup>47</sup> Ivi, 112.

<sup>48</sup> Ivi, 113.

with him<sup>49</sup>. His condition, says Schelling, is already «affected by mythology», hence by a spoilt understanding of God and his relationship to us<sup>50</sup>.

Nonetheless, our link with God is never completely shattered by the ruinous separation occurring with the Fall. Humanity maintains its imaginative power, and thanks to his freedom can in principle return in God. In fact, since humanity's nature is of being that which posits God, it cannot help but eventually following this route. As Schelling says «[humanity] falls victim to a new process through which it is led in the original relationship, being newly transformed in what posits God, and thus this process must be acknowledged as theogonic [...] a repetition of the original process through which humanity had become that which posits God».<sup>51</sup> Hence, on one level no arbitrariness is involved in this process, as it begins and ends in God: humanity necessarily brings back the awareness of its communion with God consciously and in history while unfolding anew his essential nature. Contemplation of God is thus reached not because its object lies at the end of the process but by contrast because we find at the very origin of it<sup>52</sup>. On another level, this process «although real in itself, independent of human freedom and thought [...] takes place in our consciousness [...] and thus takes place through the production of representations»<sup>53</sup>. Thus, the theogonical process is influenced by the arbitrariness of historical and cultural conditions of the human agents furthering it, as the different steps of the process are embodied by and

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<sup>49</sup> Ivi, 112.

<sup>50</sup> Ivi, 112.

<sup>51</sup> Ivi, 114.

<sup>52</sup> J. HOLSINGER SHERMAN, *Partakers of the Divine: Contemplation and the Practice of Philosophy*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 2014, 4.

<sup>53</sup> SCHELLING, *Il Monoteismo*, 114-115.

in different socio-historical situations<sup>54</sup>. Therefore, these are the two sides of the theogonical process, namely the historical process of God's self-understanding through the human soul<sup>55</sup>. This movement of the human spirit back toward God occurs after the Fall and, as we shall better see in the next chapter, is the result of the combined activities of God in creation and our receptivity to them and capacity of putting them into images.

#### 4. Mythology and Revelation

As mentioned above, the direct consequence of the Fall is the beginning of what Schelling calls the theogonical process, namely the progress of human religious consciousness toward a renewed communion with God<sup>56</sup>. I shall now discuss how Schelling divides the theogonical process into two major stages, that is, mythology and revealed religion.

Mythology is a stage of the theogonical process during which humanity is unable to grasp correctly the structure of God's life. In this respect, mythological images of God such as the polytheist ones do result from a faulty understanding of the three potencies of God. In other words, polytheists, rather than conceiving the three potencies in their essential oneness, represent them as embodied in a number of deities, often divided and opposed to one another<sup>57</sup>.

Therefore, mythology is marked by imperfect representations of God. However, these become gradually better at presenting the divine following a process that Schelling describes

<sup>54</sup> F. W. J. SCHELLING, *Philosophie der Mythologie*, in ID., *Schellings Werke*, hrsg. von Manfred Schroter, Becksche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Munchen 1943; tr. it., *Filosofia della Mitologia*, a cura di Lidia Procesi, Mursia, Milano 1998, 181.

<sup>55</sup> P. CLAYTON, *The Problem of God in Modern Thought*, 476.

<sup>56</sup> DUPRÉ, *The Role of Mythology in Schelling*, 6-7.

<sup>57</sup> WILSON, *Schellings Mythologie*, 52.

as the religious equivalent of the regeneration process of a diseased organism<sup>58</sup>. The history of mythology becomes a record of our evolving relationship with God, as we try to re-integrate the multiplicity with oneness<sup>59</sup>. Hence, in Schelling's vocabulary mythology is a concept which embraces all those representations of God which constitute steps of the process to a renewed conception of God as he really is. The result of this process is the constitution of an «inclusive monotheism», namely of a monotheism which includes creation in God's being<sup>60</sup>.

According to Schelling, all mythologies follow a pattern based on the three principles, representing them in shapes influenced by their particular socio-historical environment<sup>61</sup>. Nonetheless, only some mythologies manage to include all three potencies in their representations. Even the most realized among mythologies, that is, the Greek one, is still not fully conscious of God's spiritual nature, and subsequently fails to represent the three potencies as one<sup>62</sup>. In this regard, Schelling is crystal-clear since the very beginning of his lectures: «the Tree of all religions, which has its roots in monotheism, in the end results necessarily in the highest manifestation of monotheism, namely in Christianity»<sup>63</sup>. Mythology is a prelude to the complete and true religion, and even its best manifestations fall short of Christian ones. However, as they are part of the same tree, all religions, mythologies included, are united to all the others: as Schelling puts it, «no actual religion can be separated from another actual religion [...] in it there can be nothing but the same forces as

<sup>58</sup> SCHELLING, *Filosofia della Rivelazione*, 307.

<sup>59</sup> DUPRÉ, *The Role of Mythology in Schelling*, 6.

<sup>60</sup> Ivi, 1.

<sup>61</sup> Ivi, 5.

<sup>62</sup> Ivi, 13.

<sup>63</sup> SCHELLING, *Il Monoteismo*, 79.



those that we find in the revealed religion»<sup>64</sup>. Since God is one, no genuine religious expression can come but from him, as he is the Absolute at the root of everything.

What makes Schelling set Christianity apart from other traditions is precisely its character of being a revealed religion. Mythology is a natural process like healing, and thus, argues Schelling, «[mythology] is a religion where no productive role is given to the deity as such». Christianity, however, is another story<sup>65</sup>. Thanks to God's special act of revelation, Christianity is based on the full awareness of God according to his spirituality, and bears what mythologies lack<sup>66</sup>. In other words, all the traditional symbols of Christianity and their dogmatic expositions stand as representations of an image of God where the three potencies are reconciled as One<sup>67</sup>. Hence, while the birth of Christianity is not the last development of the relationship between God and humanity, in Christianity the theogonical process comes to an end in that after it there is no further progression in the development of our images of God. Christian representations of God are «perfect», insofar as they do not lack anything in terms of opening a way for us to be conscious of God's nature.

This claim is made by Schelling mainly in relation to the Trinitarian representation of God. As mentioned above, just like Schelling expands the understanding of monotheism, similarly he gives an account of the dogma of the Trinity as a representation of God as the spiritual union of the three potencies. Accordingly, as mythology presents imperfect representations of the three potencies, its representations are imperfect versions

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<sup>64</sup> SCHELLING, *Filosofia della Mitologia*, 139.

<sup>65</sup> SCHELLING, *Filosofia della Rivelazione*, 309.

<sup>66</sup> P. HAYNER, *Reason and Existence: Schelling's Philosophy of History*, E.J. Brill, Leiden 1967, 160-161.

<sup>67</sup> WILSON, *Schelling und Nietzsche*, 93.

of the Trinity and of monotheism as the doctrines perfectly expressing the nature of the potencies. Thus, we now see how Schelling meant to provide an explanation of non-Christian religious phenomena through Christian means, as he expands these two doctrines in order to make them the key to the understanding of our relationship with the Absolute. Hence, says Schelling, while we normally consider the Trinity as an «arbitrary», «mysterious», and «characteristically Christian» teaching, it is in fact a «universally human doctrine, given with the concept of monotheism»<sup>68</sup>. This universality of the Trinity follows insofar as its content is present in all religious expressions, as each of them represents imperfectly the potencies and their workings. However, this universally human doctrine is fully communicated in history as such only through the Christian revelation.

Thus, Christianity is in Schelling's perspective the only recipient of the divine revelation that once again discloses God's spiritual oneness to humanity. However, although he decides to prioritize a particular tradition, the result of Schelling's exploration of monotheism is God as the unfathomable unity of the three potencies, something common to all traditions as their original ground. We have also to keep in mind God's absolute freedom, which allows him not to be exhausted by any presentation of himself. Thus, it is fair to say that in Schelling's view God is free enough to deny himself as Trinity, in the sense that neither does he have any necessary relationship with, nor is fully explicated by any of his manifestations, not even the most perfect one<sup>69</sup>. Although the Trinity is the best presentation possible of God's nature, it is possible in principle to think God beyond it, as he manifests himself in other, less perfect images.

<sup>68</sup> SCHELLING, *Il Monoteismo*, 76-77.

<sup>69</sup> LIMONE, *Inizio e Trinità*, 41.

In this sense, Schelling's perspective divides religious history pre-dating Christianity into two converging narratives, both leading up to God's incarnation in Jesus. On one hand, we find the profane history of paganism, which reaches the presence but not the consciousness of the third potency. On the other hand, we find the sacred history of the progressive revelation of the true God to the people of Israel. The birth of Christ eventually puts an end to this process, therefore bringing about the only true religion<sup>70</sup>. Schelling's account of monotheism is obviously instrumental in telling these two narratives, on which Schelling spends a large deal of his lectures. However, this same account of monotheism gives us the possibility to transcend the applications it was meant for. For example, from a Christian point of view augmented by Schelling's perspective, although we believe the Trinity to be the most perfect representation of God, we can think of him appearing in different images. We could even think of a tradition giving a non-personalistic account of the One, without because of this having to deny that God is manifest through it. Hence, this non-personalistic tradition's representations would be as close to the Trinity as much as they are able to express in some shape that which Huston Smith would call religion's underlying geometry, namely the prime principles which are expressed as the three potencies in their oneness in the Holy Trinity<sup>71</sup>.

## 5. The Many Faces of God

I shall now turn to present Schelling's understanding of our religious representations. In this respect, I shall defend the thesis

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<sup>70</sup> HAYNER, *Reason and Existence*, 162-163.

<sup>71</sup> H. SMITH, *The Forgotten Truth: the Primordial Tradition*, Harper & Row, New York 1976, IX.

I briefly presented in the introduction, and show that Schelling holds religious images to be symbols, that is, manifestations of the transcendent which grow out of our relationship with God. These, play the role of connecting us to the Absolute, with ever increasing depth as the theogonical process unfolds.

First of all, it is crucial to underline that in his account of how we represent God, Schelling is eager to reject the idea that our images of God are merely mental projections. In this regard, borrowing upon Leonardo Lotito, we could say that Schelling's position is that religious representations are objectively the result of the theogonical process, and subjectively the product of human consciousness<sup>72</sup>. Furthermore, as Robert F. Brown puts it, the kind of knowledge typical of mythology is recollection, as we progressively remember God's nature<sup>73</sup>. Accordingly, all religious representations will be the result of the creative response of human consciousness to the divine, as a re-discovery of a necessity found in our Edenic, eternal and pre-reflexive immersion in God<sup>74</sup>. In other words, on one level religious representations are the results of each of the many acts of manifestation of God to humanity, while on another they are formed by the finite consciousness which is the receptacle of these manifestations and gradually sees in them a recurring theme, namely the workings of the three potencies. Therefore, our images of God are the expressions of a cooperative process of the human with the divine, as they work together toward the goal of awakening humanity to God's true nature.

In this respect, the formation of the worlds of religious imagination can be described as born out of a participatory

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<sup>72</sup> SHELLING, *Il Monoteismo*, 17.

<sup>73</sup> BROWN, *The later philosophy of Schelling*, 260-261.

<sup>74</sup> J. DAY, *Voegelin, Schelling, and the Philosophy of Historical Existence*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia 2003, 72.

relationship between humanity and the divine. In general, the concept of participation makes reference to a constitutive structure according to which a being has some quality or perfection received from a source which has the fullness of the same<sup>75</sup>. Hence, from the point of view of a metaphysics of participation, the fundamental relationship between the finite and the infinite is not one of dualism or opposition. On the contrary, such a perspective posits that these two spheres are essentially in relation one with another, with the finite participating in the infinite and receiving its defining features from it. Nonetheless, this connection does not cause them to sacrifice their differences, nor does it cancel the distance between them<sup>76</sup>.

In the context of Schelling's philosophy, our participation of God is evident in the relationship of shared creative activity, which is the fundamental intercourse between the human and the divine<sup>77</sup>. Hence, by employing our imagination, we participate in God's creativity and power, as we replicate finitely the act of creation. Although our finitude makes us able to create independently and against God's wishes, we are never out of communion with him as otherwise we could not create at all. Thus, our creativity depends essentially on and is not opposed to God's creativity. Moreover, they work in communion with each other insofar as we are attuned to him and come to represent him faithfully through our imagination.

Schelling's assessment of religious representations is grounded on the combination of such a metaphysics of participation and the doctrine of potencies. This follows, insofar as these representations are the fruits of our participation in God's

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<sup>75</sup> J. H. SHERMAN, *A Genealogy of Participation*, in J. FERRER – J. H. SHERMAN, *The Participatory Turn*, State University of New York Press, Albany 2008, 82.

<sup>76</sup> Ivi, 92.

<sup>77</sup> Ivi, 98-99.

creativity and in that they must be explained as living expressions of the three potencies. According to Schelling, the three prime principles or three potencies are «what serve as a mediation between the empirical being and the prime cause [God]». <sup>78</sup> As we come to represent God from our particular conditions we always imagine him through the prime principles and at the same time presuming them, as through them God is originally in relationship with us. In other words, we unavoidably participate in God through the three potencies. Hence, according to the fact that they contain the seeds of all possible logic and metaphysics, the different products of religious imagination will always be shaped having the three prime principles on the background.

It is crucial to underline, how Schelling insists that the three potencies are not to be understood simply as epistemic principles. They are not just categories which allow us to represent finitely some sort of God *an-sich* standing beyond experience. If this was Schelling's perspective, then he would still be lingering in what he takes to be the realm of dogmatic theism, the opposition of God and the world, with us applying a conceptual framework to a thing-in-itself <sup>79</sup>. In turn, the three prime principles are objective and real forces, «immediate principles of being» which continually appear, in the same shape, in the outwardly multifaceted reality which is creation. By contrast, the categories of modern philosophy are, according to Schelling «concepts», purely «subjective mediations» between the world and God <sup>80</sup>. While concepts only abstractly mediate between God and creation, as the workings of the three potencies are those of God, we can imagine the divine substance as a vital

<sup>78</sup> SCHELLING, *Filosofia della Rivelazione*, 409.

<sup>79</sup> CLAYTON, *The Problem of God in Modern Thought*, 479.

<sup>80</sup> SCHELLING, *Filosofia della Rivelazione*, 409.

force manifest in all nature<sup>81</sup>. Since our images of him are part of creation, they are pervaded by this vital force and thus by God himself. In this respect, we could say that in Schelling's view, religious images are not just symbols but *living* symbols. They are quite literally God's manifestations in our eyes, as their participation in God as the vital force present in nature open them to the transcendent and to infinity.

In this sense, our images of the One are the results of our participation in God's life and they are strengthened the more intense our participation is. Accordingly, we can see Christian symbols as finding the roots of their superiority in that revelation signals a heightened grade of participation in God, as we come to be aware and experience his essential freedom. This, happens insofar as, while God is silently present in mythology, he is not acknowledged as an active source of our religious representations. Mythology is a process through which human consciousness cures its post-Edenic wounds in a process dictated by natural necessity. This, does not mean that God is not present in this process as he inhabits the whole of creation: rather, this means that his presence is not recognized as such<sup>82</sup>. By contrast, Christianity is grounded in revelation as the explicit act in history of a non-human free consciousness, something that by its very existence reveals an aspect of God the mythological consciousness was not aware of, namely his ability of acting freely and outside natural necessity<sup>83</sup>. In Christianity, our participation in God is increased as a new relationship between he and humanity is established. In this we stand «face to face», and we come to know him in his freedom, as well as ourselves

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<sup>81</sup> CLAYTON, *The Problem of God*, 480.

<sup>82</sup> SCHELLING, *Filosofia della Rivelazione*, 883.

<sup>83</sup> Ivi, 883.

as his images<sup>84</sup>. Hence, we could say that symbols are the results of a symbiosis of two organisms, where the symbols develop the stronger this symbiotic relationship is. This also makes possible for religious representations to die as their age comes to pass and they are superseded by more realized representations. This happens, as over the course of the theogonical process our awareness of God's nature and his connection to the world increases, and thus we come to imagine him in different ways. Consequently, older symbols die as they do not play an active role anymore in our putting into image the divine.

In Schelling's view, the main feature of our religious symbols is that of allowing us to meet the divine in and through them. In this respect, Schelling thinks of a symbol as having what we could call an iconic character, meaning the feature of expressing and partaking of an ontologically higher reality<sup>85</sup>, which in this case is the divine. Symbols definitely presuppose a metaphysics grounded in the concept of participation, insofar as they partake of the higher realities they manifest, sharing something of the divine albeit in a reduced intensity<sup>86</sup>. Thus, although God becomes manifest through these finite vessels which symbolize him with their existence, symbols are partial to the extent that they do not exhaust completely the reality to which they make reference.

Hence, symbols are the expressions of the symbiotic relationship between God and humanity. As our awareness of this relationship shapes our understanding of the whole of our existence, symbols are what our imagination produces when it strives to give us an image of the whole<sup>87</sup>, in its effort to put into

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<sup>84</sup> Ivi, 921-925.

<sup>85</sup> D. HEDLEY, *The Iconic Imagination*, XVII.

<sup>86</sup> Ivi, 145.

<sup>87</sup> Ivi, 45.



an image God, creation, and humanity as in communion with one another. Furthermore, as we produce symbols out of our forces as much as they come to us thanks to divine impulses, symbols are our creations, but at the same time they are as it were given to us. Hence, they are positioned simultaneously in the immanent and in the transcendent sphere. This allows them to be a key to understand our nature, as well as that of God and our connection to him<sup>88</sup>.

According to Janet Martin Soskice, insofar as symbols are employed as references to something else, they elicit the use of metaphoric language<sup>89</sup>. By this, she means a kind of language which talks about something by employing terms suggestive of another reality<sup>90</sup>. In this regard, we can recall Rowan Williams' distinction between speaking in a representative or metaphoric way and speaking in a descriptive way. While in the second case we speak in order to imitate features of the world, in the first case, by contrast, we are concerned with incorporating, translating, expanding, and giving shape to what we perceive<sup>91</sup>. Crucially, the latter is in general the kind of linguistic activity that Schelling is entertaining as he gives an account of the Christian dogmas and of religious representations in general.

As an example, we can think of Schelling describing the figure of Nemesis. In this respect, Nemesis is «the force angry at who enjoys good luck without any merit of his own», and also «the supreme law, which opposes what is ambiguous, and thus generally speaking the accidental»<sup>92</sup>. As we can see, of the two

<sup>88</sup> Ivi, 147-148.

<sup>89</sup> J. M. SOSKICE, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1985, 54-5.

<sup>90</sup> Ivi, 15.

<sup>91</sup> R. WILLIAMS, *The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language*, Bloomsbury, London 2014, 22-24.

<sup>92</sup> SCHELLING, *Filosofia della Mitologia*, 13-14.

descriptions, the first adheres more to the mythological account of Nemesis than the second. However, they do not exclude one another, as Schelling puts these two reflections literally in the same page. Even the first description gives an account of Nemesis in terms of a force, hence presenting a tendency to transcend the boundaries of the mythological figure itself. This, is an instance of the usage of language that Soskice suggests symbols elicit. Force is a term which here makes reference to its embodiment, Nemesis, but that at the same time suggests another reality, present in the figure of Nemesis but in a sense going beyond it. In this, just like in the case of the Trinity, we see how Schelling employs the Greek deity and the sort of language she elicits, in order to address elements of reality which are expressed in the symbol but are in a sense different from the symbol as they are not exhausted by it. Then, we can think of God as one, and represent him as the Holy Trinity. In this, we shall find two symbols representing him, which at the same time make metaphorical reference to and thus give us insight into the unfathomable unity which constitute the three potencies.

As regards what I mean by metaphor, I want to stress how I am employing this concept borrowing on Soskice's claim that we should understand metaphors just as a way of using our language<sup>93</sup>. Therefore, models, allegories, symbols, may elicit or connect to metaphoric language, but are different from metaphors as they have a non-linguistic nature<sup>94</sup>. This is important, as often metaphor is simply a synonym for allegory. This, is exactly what Schelling thinks symbols are not, as allegories are always to be understood as posing for something else which is their true meaning, according to a one-to-one relationship<sup>95</sup>. As

<sup>93</sup> SOSKICE, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 15.

<sup>94</sup> Ivi, 54-55.

<sup>95</sup> HEDLEY, *Living Forms of the Imagination*, 134-135.

a matter of fact, to understand metaphors as allegories otherwise named, is also akin to a view that Soskice disagrees with and understands as opposing her reading of the concept of metaphor. She calls this the substitution theory of metaphor, namely an account of metaphors as the replacement for something else<sup>96</sup>.

Hence, by linking Schelling's reading of symbols to Soskice's understanding of metaphors, I am not denying what he calls their tautegorical as opposed to allegorical character. By this term, Schelling means that symbols signify nothing but themselves<sup>97</sup>, and thus, as opposed to Euhemeristic interpretations, must not be understood as imaginary portraits of historical or natural events<sup>98</sup>. Instead, symbols and therefore mythological representations ought to be understood in terms of their relationship with the higher dimension which gives life to them<sup>99</sup>. Symbols signify themselves as, as much as they do not exhaust what they embody, symbols signify themselves as they are the living manifestations of the divine, present to us thanks and through them. As Schelling says in his account of the goddess Persephone, «she does not just mean, but *is* that principle that we see in her, [she is] an essence existing in actuality: this is valid as well for all other [mythological] deities»<sup>100</sup>.

Metaphors generated by our religious symbols do not simply allow us to form a linguistic connection between them and God. As Jerry Day puts it, symbols are primordial forces connected to what remains unarticulated beyond our thought and language<sup>101</sup>. By «suggesting» the divine reality they give us a

<sup>96</sup> SOSKICE, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 8-14.

<sup>97</sup> HEDLEY, *Living Forms of the Imagination*, 117

<sup>98</sup> Ivi, 122-123.

<sup>99</sup> Ivi, 123-124.

<sup>100</sup> SCHELLING, *Filosofia della Rivelazione*, 831.

<sup>101</sup> DAY, *Voegelin, Schelling*, 73.

perspective on it, and new metaphors bring new ways of speaking and relating ourselves to God<sup>102</sup>, hence further articulating this ground of which Day writes about. Accordingly, symbols are that which originates what Hans Blumenberg calls fundamental metaphors<sup>103</sup>. These, are representations of the unfathomable totality, something in virtue of which an entire conception of the reality, both divine and human is born. These fundamental metaphors are also then the basis from which we derive our conduct and way of looking at the world<sup>104</sup>.

As Markus Gabriel rightly argues while addressing Schelling, our existence is inescapably made up of symbols presenting the unconditioned in a conditioned way, and we live and act according to our way of perceiving and furthering this process of presenting the Absolute<sup>105</sup>. It follows that further development of our symbols and the metaphors they generate also broadens our conceptual array and our spirituality<sup>106</sup>. In other words, by imagining new symbols and metaphors, and by exploring and deepening the nature of those in which we are already embedded, we strengthen our communion with the realities such symbols embody<sup>107</sup>. Each time we refine our understanding of our religious representations, we change their influence on the development of our future interpretations of the divine, as well as our bond with God in general.

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<sup>102</sup> SOSKICE, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 57-58.

<sup>103</sup> In this context we should speak of them as fundamental symbols, as Blumenberg seems to understand metaphors the way Schelling understand symbols.

<sup>104</sup> H. BLUMENBERG, *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 2010, 14.

<sup>105</sup> G. Markus – S. ZIZEK, *Mythology, Madness and Laughter: Subjectivity in German Idealism*, Continuum, London 2009, 75.

<sup>106</sup> SOSKICE, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 62.

<sup>107</sup> WILLIAMS, *The Edge of Words*, 69.

## 6. The Way Back

As I have explored Schelling's understanding of religious representations, in this section I shall give an account of how these relate to what Schelling calls the theogonical process. As discussed in the first chapter, our post-Fall condition opens the necessity of a historical process ending with our full awareness of God's nature. Furthermore, this process reflects the accomplishment of God's plan for creation. In this respect, mythology and its culmination in revelation manifest the broader pattern of reconciliation of the whole of creation in God<sup>108</sup>, and Schelling himself claims that mythology as a transition is fundamental in relationship to «the universal plan of Providence»<sup>109</sup>. Hence, the process advances with the enrichment of our religious representations from the mythological to the revealed ones. Therefore, it is possible to speak of our religious images in terms of them being closer than others to manifest God properly<sup>110</sup>.

Accordingly to the providential nature of the theogonical process, the development from one step of the process to another is not dictated by randomness, and even less it is the passage from mythology to revealed religion. Once more, let us borrow on Rowan Williams' words, as he rightly claims that the world always comes to us in symbols, and all we can do in order to understand it, it is as something of which we have to speak further<sup>111</sup>. Our speaking further dictates the development of our symbols and the metaphoric language attached to them according to the previous conditions in which we found ourselves. The workings of the three potencies give us direction,

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<sup>108</sup> Wilson, *Schellings Mythologie*, 51.

<sup>109</sup> SCHELLING, *Il Monoteismo*, 117-118.

<sup>110</sup> DUPRÈ, *The Role of Mythology in Schelling's Late Philosophy*, 5.

<sup>111</sup> WILLIAMS, *The Edge of Words*, 69.

and this according to God's providence as Schelling sees it at work in the history of humanity. Therefore, the development of our religious representations in mythology follows a route, which is set to flow into and cease with revelation. In order to characterize the stages of the theogonical process, I wish to borrow again upon Markus Gabriel's reading of Schelling, and in particular on his distinction between objectification and reification. In this regard, to objectify the Absolute is to make it manifest while preserving its elusiveness. In turn, to reify the Absolute is to present it in a supposedly transparent way, as if it was something standing on its own, independent of our activities. Thus, a reified presentation of the absolute is false insofar as it is blind to the Absolute's inexhaustibility<sup>112</sup>, seeking to erase that space of metaphoric and evocative language which exists between the symbol and its origin.

Crucially, for an image to be an objectification or a reification is not to possess some sort of timeless property. Rather, an image can run out of its vitality, and stop being an objectification. In fact, Schelling sees the whole of mythology as a reification when compared to revealed religion, although it made room for objectifications of the Absolute before the coming of Christianity. Moreover, we can locate the same kind of dynamics inside mythology itself. This is evident from the very beginning of Schelling's lectures, with his description of the peripheralisation of the first mythological deities with the coming of the next wave of gods, namely the following step of the theogonical process<sup>113</sup>.

As already mentioned, the theogonical process happens through a mixture of necessity and arbitrariness. On one level, each unfolding of God's life is grounded in and shaped by the

<sup>112</sup> MARKUS - ZIZEK, *Mythology, Madness and Laughter*, 76.

<sup>113</sup> SCHELLING, *Filosofia della Mitologia*, 48-49.

potencies, but on another level, each of these passages is instantiated through personal inspiration and other human factors. As a result, although sometimes we even have different interpretations of the same myth, according to Schelling we can still find a «necessary relationship in consciousness (independent of the arbitrariness of personal representations)» across the different versions<sup>114</sup>. This necessary relationship is a manifestation of the potencies as they are the source of all logic and metaphysics. Therefore, it is also a manifestation of God's presence in our religious representations through the potencies. Subsequently, by discerning this presence we come to know the potencies and thus we come to know God's nature better as we see it instantiated in our religious representations, thus making theogony progress. According to Schelling this mostly means that we come to an ever greater awareness of God's spirituality, as we go deeper into the nature of the potencies and realize their identity<sup>115</sup>.

Schelling finds Greek mythology to be the highest point of mythology as it is able of expressing all three potencies with a degree of spirituality that we find nowhere else in the pagan world<sup>116</sup>. The Hellenic represented the three potencies as the three different forms that the god Dionysus assumes<sup>117</sup>. However, although Greek mythology acknowledges that the three potencies are one, it still fails to see the oneness underlying the different images of God, and how the potencies can be one without their differences ceasing to be. The three forms of Dionysus are separated from one another, and do not enjoy the same degree of oneness which binds the three persons of the Trinity. Thus, only by revelation we finally come to an under-

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<sup>114</sup> Ivi, 181.

<sup>115</sup> WILSON, *Nietzsche und Schelling*, 85.

<sup>116</sup> DUPRÉ, *The Role of Mythology in Schelling's Late Philosophy*, 3.

<sup>117</sup> WILSON, *Schellings Mythologie*, 16.

standing of God's oneness which represent the potencies in an organic oneness<sup>118</sup>.

At this point we have to resist the temptation of falling back in a framework/content dichotomy. In the light of the participatory stance I introduced above and to which I ascribe, we must not think of our images of God as more or less precise conceptual structure that we apply to a transcendent object. Once more, Persephone is the principle, the necessary relationship that we see in her through our consciousness. Accordingly, the Trinity is not the perfect representation of God because of its exceptional descriptive accuracy. The three potencies and the laws we find in them are not something to be described, but drives according to which living beings develop. In other words, in Schelling's perspective the Trinity is the most sublime symbol of God as it is able to fully embody the nature and power of God's life, rather than being something we superimpose to some sort of pre-existing pattern.

In Schelling's words, the images introduced by revealed religion are «images of the supreme unity which is the archetype of everything concrete there is», and, as they bring together the three potencies in their oneness, «they shall be perfect, realized in themselves»<sup>119</sup>. In light of this, mythologies are the scenery of struggle as the human spirit is pushed onto the next step of the theogonic process. By contrast, there is no continuation of the theogonical process after Christianity as its images are perfect and realized. Rather, a different sort of process takes place in revealed religion, namely that involving the development of the implications of its symbols and thus the augmentation of its tradition. As he puts it, even with the advent of revelation

<sup>118</sup> DUPRÈ, *The Role of Mythology in Schelling's late Mythology*, 5.

<sup>119</sup> SCHELLING, *Il Monoteismo*, 110



Satan is defeated but not destroyed<sup>120</sup>. In other words, revelation does not remove completely the danger of reification, namely that of symbols losing their capacity of communicating God, as they can cease to resonate with the human spirit. Even if now the symbols provided by the revealed religion are complete, the possibility of re-enacting the fallen condition switches from the images of God to humanity's spiritual reality<sup>121</sup>.

Borrowing upon Raimon Panikkar, we might say that no religion reflects human perfection - in Schelling's terms, not even revealed religion does. However, the latter is the integral way toward humanity's flourishing in God<sup>122</sup>. In mythology, we ought to understand the different steps of the theogonical process in the light of the increasing truth of the symbols of God. In revealed religion, the concern is not so much around our images of God as in a sense they cannot be improved. Rather, we must care about how much these images are interiorized. In mythology the images of the divine become more and more spiritual as we better imagine God, whereas in revealed religion to do the same does not bring new images but rather deepen our relationship with them. In other words, Christians do not ever get to move past the image of God as the Holy Trinity, but can develop an ever better communion with the transcendent by deepening their understanding of this symbol of the divine. In other words, they can always re-imagine the Trinity, this way developing the metaphorical bridge between the symbol and God and renewing the life of their relationship with God.

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<sup>120</sup> WILSON, *Schellings Mythologie*, 87.

<sup>121</sup> Ivi, 88-89.

<sup>122</sup> R. PANIKKAR, *Religione e Religioni*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1964, 123.

## Conclusion

I now wish to sum up the results of this brief analysis. As I argued in the introduction, the concept of monotheism appears to be the core of Schelling's series of lectures in Berlin. This follows for two reasons. First, the reading developed by Schelling lets us understand all of our religious representations as embodying the same divine reality, while at the same time allowing preserving the uniqueness of this reality. This, provides Schelling with the possibility of producing an history of religion as the progressive augmentation of our awareness of the true nature of the divine dimension, as well as the deepening of our participation of it. Subsequently, he is able to treat all of humanity's religious expressions as parts and successive steps of the same process.

Secondly, the necessary connection between monotheism and the doctrine of the potencies, that is, the one between Trinitarianism and divine uniqueness as seen from a philosophical perspective, produces in Schelling's account the yardstick to measure the degree of participation of the divine that a particular religious symbol represents. Understanding the Holy Trinity as the most perfect among the possible symbolizations of the divine, other religious representations are placed on a scale according to the degree they resemble the Trinity. In other words, monotheism in its connection to the doctrine of the potencies gives to Schelling the means necessary to develop his philosophical analysis of what he calls the theogonical process.

As a conclusion, I hold that the concept of monotheism is the key to the understanding of the project Schelling is developing in his Berlin lectures. Not only the work Schelling does in the first six lectures in the series on the philosophy of mythology sets the background for everything that follows, but it also provides the necessary cross-reference for the rest of the discussion, as to

truly know God according to Trinitarian monotheism becomes the goal of religious and therefore human history.